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SUBJECT: SUDAN - USAID VISIT TO BLUE NILE STATE

Summary

¶1. USAID/Sudan representatives from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Office of Food for Peace (FFP), and Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) visited Damazin, Kurmuk, and Bukori in Blue Nile State from April 19 to 24, 2006. Factors affecting stability in Blue Nile State are control of land use, formation of a joint Blue Nile State government by the majority National Congress Party (NCP) and minority Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), and the high number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees returning to war-affected communities lacking adequate public services and infrastructure. End Summary.

Slow Progress Towards North-South Integration

¶2. The differences between northern and southern Blue Nile State mirror Sudan's North-South conflict. Damazin is a thriving town with bustling markets, government services, and infrastructure, including a paved road to Khartoum, whereas southern Blue Nile and its major town, Kurmuk, exhibit the general state of underdevelopment that characterizes southern Sudan. While the NCP and SPLM have started to share power in Blue Nile State in the formula established by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the state civil service has not yet been integrated.

View from the State Capital - Damazin

¶3. In Damazin, USAID/OTI staff met with the Blue Nile State governor to discuss the possibility of providing state institutions with "ministry-in-a-box" kits, packages consisting of office furniture, essential equipment and supplies, and a generator. (Note: USAID/OTI is providing similar kits to South Kordofan State and seven state governments in southern Sudan. End note.) The Governor welcomed the offer and said that Blue Nile State is "far ahead" of South Kordofan in integrating NCP and SPLM administrative structures. The Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC) and Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SRRC), government humanitarian offices respectively controlled by the NCP and SPLM, have merged into a single humanitarian office. The office is directed by an SPLM appointee, with the NCP controlling the deputy position.

Challenges in Kurmuk

¶4. Government control of land and nomadic incursions into cultivated areas remain the greatest threats to peace in southern Blue Nile. Since 1970, the central government in Khartoum has controlled land use in southern Blue Nile, ceding the best agricultural lands to outsiders who have poorly managed natural resources. Nomadic herders traveling through southern Blue Nile have also caused damage to local crops. In addition, armed nomads who are widely believed to be politically linked to Damazin and Khartoum have moved into the area, increasing competition for limited water resources. These nomadic groups are believed to receive support from the Sudanese government as part of its "national defense system."

¶5. A second major difficulty is the integration of the joint state civil service. A wide disparity in skills and capacity exists between NCP officials in Damazin and SPLM officials in southern Blue Nile. While many NCP authorities worked in offices during the civil war, most SPLM officials are unaccustomed to working in an office environment and have received no salaries or training since joining the local government. The Kurmuk County Commissioner requested USAID support for building SPLM management and administration capacity. He stated that this would put SPLM officials on more equal terms with NCP colleagues and result in a smoother transition to a joint system of government.

¶6. A third major problem in Blue Nile State is lack of infrastructure and health, water, and education services required to support the large number of returning

KHARTOUM 00001369 002 OF 002

refugees and IDPs. Approximately 70,000 refugees currently live in three camps across the Ethiopian border. The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is assisting 6,000 Sudanese refugees to return to southern Blue Nile before seasonal rains begin in June. UNHCR plans to organize additional returns later in the year. In addition, many IDPs are returning to southern Blue Nile from northern areas of the state.

¶7. The U.N. recently de-mined the road connecting Damazin to Kurmuk, boosting the local economy and facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance. As a result, NGOs and U.N. agencies are increasing programs in health, education, water, and food security. Many NGOs operating in Kurmuk continue to coordinate operations from Nairobi and Juba rather than Damazin or Khartoum. A representative from the U.N. Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) stated that agencies need to adjust coordination mechanisms to comply with the CPA.

USAID Efforts to Provide a Peace Dividend

¶8. USAID supports three large NGO humanitarian programs in Blue Nile State. The Irish NGO GOAL established 13 primary health care clinics. U.S.-based Samaritan's Purse established a hospital in Kurmuk, constructed six primary schools, and maintains ongoing food security programs. Norwegian People's Aid manages food aid and agricultural recovery projects.

¶9. USAID is the major donor supporting the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) in Blue Nile State. WFP has pre-positioned more than 2,000 metric tons of food aid in southern Blue Nile and plans to distribute it during the upcoming hunger season.

¶10. USAID is also implementing a project that aims to mitigate conflict over land use. The project maps local

administrative boundaries, "bomas" and "payams", to delineate residential and commercial areas, public buildings, community farms and forests, and reserve land. The project has only been implemented in SPLM-controlled areas thus far, as NCP authorities in Damazin do not yet approve of communities reestablishing traditional authority over land use. In March, the project facilitated discussions between farmers and nomads about land use rights, access to water, and ways to resolve disputes. Nomad representatives at the conference agreed to disarm, but several other groups have refused to lay down arms. Follow-up discussions are needed to advance the process.

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